

## **THESIS SUMMARY**

**Eszter Kovács**

Informality, Self-organization, Quasi-publicity

*Culture, sport, everyday discourses, church holidays and entertainment in the Gyergyó Basin in the 1970s and 1980s*

Supervisor:

**Nándor Bárdi, PhD**

Budapest, 2021

**Doctoral School of Sociology and Communications Studies**

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## Table of content

<b>1. Introduction – research question.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Methodology and description of topics .....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1. <i>Description of topics</i> .....	9
2.1.1. Local formation in The song of Romania .....	9
2.1.2. The Friendship Art Camp .....	10
2.1.3. Sport and self-organization .....	11
2.1.4. Bantering.....	12
2.1.5. Church holidays and entertainment based on the consumption of Western media products.....	13
2.2. <i>Methodology frameworks for informality and quasi-publicity</i> .....	15
2.2.1. Informality .....	15
2.2.2. Quasi-Publicity .....	17
<b>3. Results of the dissertation .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>4. References.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>5. Annexes .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>6. The autor’s publications on the topic.....</b>	<b>30</b>

## 1. Introduction – research question

The aim of my dissertation is to reconstruct everyday life in the second half of the Ceaușescu era (1974–1989) through the example of the Gyergyó Basin. I am looking at a period when everyday life has become hard to bear for the population and the nationalities living in the country. The party's leadership's response to the failed economic policy and the bad living conditions was to ideologically tighten and strengthen Ceaușescu's personal cult. The dissertation focuses on the social practice of the interaction between power and individuals in the analysis of recollections.

My main research question is: What were the responses of the “bottom” layer of the society to the dictatorship that ruled everyday life? I interpret the events of social communications as cultural actions, I emphasize the behaviors and their symbolic dimensions (Szijártó 2001: 120), I depict and analyze them in a descriptive way. In this regard, my dissertation is related to the research carried out by the KAM – Center for Regional and Anthropological Research in Csíkszereda – on the society of Szeklerland in the eighties. Mostly to those who analyze attitudes toward power, they are about the parallel operation of the “below” and “above” worlds, or in other words, the worlds of “we” and “them” and the techniques of passing between them (Bodó 2004: 16).

My research examines everyday life along two key phenomena: in the light of *informality* and the *quasi-publicity* associated with it. The aim of the dissertation is to analyze the informal social practices in different fields, which means the *open secrets*, *unwritten rules* and *micro-practices* of the society studied in the era to go about daily business, to access material and symbolic goods (Ledeneva 2018a: 1-9). I analyze dialogues, situations and expressions that are symbolic in terms of recollections and have a special meaning in everyday language. With the examination of informality, an expressed goal of the dissertation is to highlight the topic of informality in the research framework that shows the informal practices of the minorities of totalitarian systems related to ethnic and religious identity. I want to go beyond the theoretical framework that defines forms of action different to the official socialist economic, political, cultural activities solely as resistance. I think it is worth analyzing the different cases in terms of their uniqueness, complexity and broader socio-cultural context, from which we can find out what activities the given informal practice involved and, if so, to what extent it can correspond to the phenomenon of resistance.

Thus, instead of examining the informal economy, which occupies a dominant position in literature, I analyze informal actions in the fields of cultural and sports life and in the quasi-public operation of ethnic and religious identity.

The quasi-publicity is the one that was closer to the formal, official space, but also gave way to informal events. Participants used elements from both the public and private spheres to keep their actions unmarked. During the period under review, the official publicity functioned as a representative publicity of power, so participants sought to use its symbols to form a discourse different from that of power. In fact, quasi-publicity was the only public sphere in the era where (Hungarian) ethnic identity could be operated publicly as described above (Bodó 2004: 56–63). I take into account the phenomenon of symbolic resistance – in justified cases – both in informality and in the analysis of quasi-publicity. I consider as symbolic resistance any manifestation that is built from the set of representational elements of official ideology, it does not publicly rebel against the existing system, but the ambiguous use of representations, language, means of communication, non-verbal expressions aim to create meanings different from official ideology. Such cases can be interpreted as symbolic attacks on power.

The dissertation deals with the study of the local social and cultural world of informal strategies accumulated in the period, operated in parallel with official provisions and representations (The song of Romania, Daciada, atheist propaganda, national socialist homogenization experiments, etc.). A comparative study of local relations with the world economic system and other Eastern European countries or certain regions of Romania is not part of the dissertation due to content and space limitations, I believe that this could be a next, more extensive level, a continuation of the research.

In the study of the phenomena of social communication characteristic of the period, I distinguished four topics:

The first topic seeks to reconstruct the cultural activities of the amateur art formations of the Gyergyó Basin. The second part of the first topic of my analysis focusing on the activities in high culture, more precisely the Friendship Art Camp in Gyergyószárhegy, which I consider to be a self-organizing community.

The second major topic of the dissertation is the analysis of sports life, on the one hand through professionalism within the socialist framework and on the other hand through the everyday life of amateur, self-organizing sports communities. I give an insight into the organization of the hockey, football, the Gyergyó Ski Association and the Old-Boys basketball team and I also examine the circumstances of the establishment of various sports facilities (ice rink, ski lift).

The third topic analyzes everyday discourses through bantering. Their content reflects the contradictions of the period under study, the difficult living conditions and the unspeakable tensions in society.

The fourth theme of my work seeks to reconstruct the church celebrations and fate-turning celebrations in the individual life, moreover entertainment events based on the consumption of American and Western European media products. I will describe the topics in more detail in the next chapter.

## **2. Methodology and description of topics**

The research analyzes responses to a dictatorship above the necessities of everyday life. I found it necessary to highlight areas where the growing strength of ideological rigor encouraged people to engage in everyday creativity. For the research, I chose to use ethnographic methods because it was not possible to use the participatory observation method. During the research I used semi-structured in-depth interviews. I find the interview method suitable for getting closer to the past life of the respondents, thus describing and reconstructing the life events they experienced (Kvale 2005: 20). For this, I used the interpretive approach used in anthropology, in which the interviewees interpret their own lives from their recollections. The interviews provide an opportunity to reconstruct the period of the seventies and eighties on the basis of the narratives and the method allows focusing on certain topics with more tied and open questions, furthermore allows for the creation of individual, hitherto unknown narratives (Kvale 2005: 42). Nevertheless, I keep in mind that the researcher does not have the knowledge of everything at the same time and does not have all the possible points of view in the reconstruction of the past and they interpret and evaluate the past from the perspective of the present (Gyáni 2015: 55–56). So this kind of interview method does not reflect the process of the differences between the experiences once lived and the events recalled in the present, in this case the changes of the past thirty years. On the other hand, the method does not allow me to answer what actually happened, so it is not my goal to discover objective truth or objective history (Kovács 2007: 42–43). Using the method, my goal was to evoke the former social context and accumulated experience. The informants were related to the four topics, for example, they were actively involved in cultural and / or sports life during the period under review. I selected the interviewees using the snowball method, assuming that the personal relationship system between them was of paramount importance (Peter 2018: 15). First, I asked former primary and

secondary school teachers, school principals and leaders of amateur theater groups. My goal was the emerging topics be built from case studies. I carried out the fieldwork in Gyergyószentmiklós and the surrounding settlements (Gyergyószárhegy, Gyergyóditró, Gyergyóremete, Gyergyóalfalu, Gyergyócsomafalva, Gyergyóújfalú, Borszék, Maroshévíz). After – as a result of the 1968 territorial reorganization – the Gyergyó Basin became part of Harghita County with Csíkszereda as its seat, the state institutions of Gyergyószentmiklós became dependent on the county state bodies. The central, planned instructions came from there to the towns and settlements of the county, such as from the county's party committee, trade union, cultural committee, Communist Youth Association committee, etc. The consequence of the dependence was that the heads of official bodies of the county, the bureaucrats, inspectors, etc. were given the opportunity to get in touch with leaders of local institutions. During the fieldwork, there were several references to the professional and friendly relationship with the Csíkszereda superiors, thus five interviews are connected to the county's cultural and administrative elite.

Between January 2018 and September 2020, a total of 59 interviews were conducted with 65 individuals, which means that in three cases I interviewed two interviewees at once. The joint interviews developed spontaneously, usually a close acquaintance or family member of the planned interviewee also joined the conversation, so I asked him/her the questions as well. Of the 56 interviews (in addition to the three joint interviews), five were followed by another discussion that complemented the topic. So the empirical basis of the dissertation is the 59 interviews, of which I quote several times during the case studies. The topics in the recollections increased or decreased depending on their occupation, personal relationships and interests.

The 59 interviews contain 4 600 minutes material, with an average length of one hour and eighteen minutes. Prior to each interview, the interviewees gave their oral consent that what they said could be used in an anonymized form in my dissertation. A database was created from the typed interview texts, in which I assigned the identities of the interviewees (all participants, 65 people) to codes.<sup>1</sup> The code names were grouped as follows: gender, age, locality, work area, and type of interview. I proceeded to anonymize the interviews according to a study by Louise Corti, Annette Day and Gill Backhouse on the anonymization of qualitative data (Corti 2000, Corti – Day – Backhouse 2000). They provide several aspects for the anonymization strategy, all of which protect the privacy rights of the interviewees. First, they emphasize that oral or written consent from interviewees are an essential element in the use of qualitative

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<sup>1</sup>The transcript of the interviews and the database can be found in a GoogleDrive document called "Interviews 2018–2020" which is available through the author.

methods. The recognizability, surname and first name of the interviewees and the name of the workplace cannot be indicated. There are exceptions in oral history interviews where interviewees insist that their names be included in the archive. The next step in anonymization is to replace personal names with aliases and codes. The naming of aliases and codes is based on the decision of the researcher, the goal being to minimize recognizability.

In my dissertation, I grouped the interviewees in a table according to codes (e.g., R1, R2, etc.).<sup>2</sup> When marking the occupations, I indicated only the area in a broad sense. For example, in the case of teachers, I did not name the specific field, only that they were active in education. The group of “Cultural Leaders” includes the propaganda secretary, the leader of the theater group, the leader of the folkdance ensemble, the director of the community centre, the higher bodies responsible for culture, the newspaper editors and the leaders of the publishing houses. The group of “Cultural Life” included writers, musicians, visual artists, and those engaged in amateur cultural activities. Athletes, coaches, amateurs but people who can be tied to institutions and regularly engage in sports activities were included in the group of “Sports”. “Administration” refers to positions that can be assigned to local administrative-state institutions. These include the positions of President of the People's Council, Vice President of the People's Council, clerk, propaganda secretary, trade union and economic institution leader. The group of “Church” included the positions of priest, cantor, bell ringer, church counselor, parish caretaker. The group of “Skilled Worker” included those people who filled a job requiring a professional qualification in factories or plants. The group of “Healthcare” refers to all people who worked in the health sector, doctors, nurses, carers, emergency nurses. “Technical Intellectuals” refers to university graduates and those in the technical field, who mostly held senior positions in local factories and plants or who were the leaders of these institutions. The group of “Students” refers to those who were vocational students or secondary school students.

In addition to the interviews, the empirical part of the research is provided by memoirs. These are written recollections of people who balanced in the social-power system of the period. These can mostly be interpreted as stories which legitimize their social position, relationships and behavior of the recaller. Career events are described in detail and these writings are about performance, participation in important events, relationships with significant people, which also give the context of the described period, the wider social environment (Keszeg 2011: 182).

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<sup>2</sup>The table is in the annexes.



Finally, newspaper articles, archival data from Harghita County branch of the State Archives and the Archives of Gyergyószentmiklós Archdiocese of Gyulafehérvár complemented the empirical part and my field diary notes. The latter are handwritten notes in the form of a diary, which cannot be linked to specific interviews but as recordings of thoughts and quotations made during informal conversations on the topic in the field. These are at least as important a part of the research as the interviews, because in several cases such sharp sentences and memory fragments came to the surface that does not happen in a direct interview situation due to the compulsion to comply, to formulate correctly and to make a good impression.

## **2.1. Description of topics**

### **2.1.1. Local formation in The song of Romania**

At the beginning of the research, I only had presuppositions about what prominent events of the eighties may have played a major role in the lives of the people living in the region. I gave the title *Formal Culture and Movement and Organization: The song of Romania* to the topic of cultural life. In the initial exploratory interviews, my questions were mostly grouped around the mass cultural event, however, as the applied snowball method led to the target individuals, it became more and more outlined what kind of case studies could be created. This depended on who were active in the cultural life during the study period, what role they played and whether they undertook to recall what happened then. After the completed case studies, I expanded the name of the topic, as not only the cultural competitions were given a leading role but also the Friendship Art Camp in Szárhegy.

The first case study examines the quasi-publicity and informal administration around Song of *Romania*, not only focusing on a local event or the everyday life of a cultural formation but the case study from Gyergyószentmiklós and the surrounding villages provides an empirical basis for the case study. In contrast, the everyday life of the Art Camp is focused on Gyergyószárhegy. The common point in both case studies is that cultural life worked thanks to strong informal social ties and practical solutions.

The examined region is Gyergyószentmiklós and the surrounding settlements (Gyergyóremete, Gyergyóditró, Gyergyószárhegy, Gyergyóalfalu, Gyergyóújfalú, Gyergyócsomafalva). Based on semi-structured in-depth interviews (7 interviews in total) conducted between January 2018 and August 2020, the case study seeks to reconstruct the cultural life of the eighties from the perspective of amateur formations. In the study I selected situations that discuss informal solutions for the public operation of local and national identity in the cultural competition called

Song of Romania, which was precisely aimed at uniformizing society in the spirit of “culture”. I try to reconstruct the situations through the world of the operators by which I mean the actors of the local cultural elite who controlled the various cultural institutions and organizations. The interviewees came from the following positions (during the study period): teacher, conductor, propaganda secretary, cultural director, representatives of the Cultural Committee from Csíkszereda and factory workers who participated in amateur theater groups, brass bands, folk dance groups. When selecting the interviewees, my goal was to have a conversation about all the settlements of the Gyergyó Basin including Gyergyószentmiklós. In the interviews I followed the same guideline with personalized questions depending on position, age and social embeddedness. I also asked open-ended questions that were curious about the personal experiences of cultural events or how they were organized and how things were handled. In the case of these questions I tried not to influence them and get the most nuanced picture from the answers. I was curious and wanted to support with concrete examples how the operators of cultural life in the “darkest years of dictatorship”, formulated by the common language in the Gyergyó region, balanced between official coercion and local needs. How to walk the paths on which ethnic identity could be openly exercised.

### **2.1.2. The Friendship Art Camp**

At the beginning of the research, the aim of the dissertation was not to reconstruct the everyday life of the Szárhegy Art Camp. However, the proximity of each interviewee to both the camp and the management of cultural life at the time provided an opportunity to reconstruct the operation of the camp in light of semi-structured in-depth interviews (8 in total), archival documents and memoirs.<sup>3</sup> The respondents include the organizers-maintainers of the camp or people connected to the institution in some way (economic, caring, etc.) who participated in the operation of the art colony with their work, expertise or other resources. For example, the Council of Elders, mentioned in Lajos Zöld's memoir, members of the Youth Circle of Friends, community workers and members of the county's cultural committee during the restoration of the camp and all the leaders of the camp are all interviewees. The chronological reconstruction of every event and change in the life of the Camp is not the aim of the dissertation, they are

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<sup>3</sup>Májai Albert (2015): *Rezsimek szorításában*. Gyergyószentmiklós, Mark House Kiadó; Zöld Lajos (1999): *A víz szalad, a kő marad. 25 év a gyergyószárhegyi Barátság alkotótábor életéből*. Csíkszereda, Megyei Kulturális Központ – Gyergyószárhegy és Hargita megye Tanácsa.

detailed in the previously mentioned memoirs. From the point of view of the content of the dissertation, I try to analyze the current national and local political-economic changes of the period and their consequences as well as the work and network of the people operating the Camp. The examined region is located in the eastern part of Transylvania, Gyergyószárhegy, which administratively belongs to Harghita County after the territorial reorganization in 1968. It is located 6 km from Gyergyószentmiklós on the southern side of Szármány Hill at an altitude of 770 meters above sea level. Szárhegy has a smaller settlement, Gődüctelep, located further away from the village center. According to the 1977 census, the population of the village is 4,349 (Varga E. 1998: 42). The population of Szárhegy is ethnically and religiously homogeneous, mostly Hungarian and Roman Catholics. The reputation of the village is linked to Gábor Bethlen and the counts of Lázár, as he spent his childhood in the Lázár Castle in Szárhegy. Szárhegy, similarly to the villages and linguistic and cultural traditions of the Gyergyó Basin, is a settlement where the social organizing power of the church is outstanding (Péter 2018: 19). Community holidays, such as the Farewell Day of the Assumption, can only be held after the change of regime but since the mid-1970s, intergenerational meetings have been held regularly every year.

### **2.1.3. Sport and self-organization**

The topic of sports was organized around the block of questions entitled *Formal Sports Event and Movement Organization: Daciada*, also with the same assumptions as the previous topic but right after the first few interviews it turned out that the Daciada mass sports event did not live in the minds or they did not focus on it, but on the operation of local sports institutions and the sports established in Gyergyószentmiklós (hockey, cross-country skiing, ski jumping, football, basketball). The region examined is the town of Gyergyószentmiklós, located in the eastern part of Transylvania, administratively belonging to Harghita County after the 1968 territorial reorganization. At the end of the sixties, socialist industrialization began in the city as well, the furniture factory was handed over in 1972, which produced large quantities of furniture, not only domestically but also for export and then in 1977 it became a factory. Thus, by the eighties, it already consisted of three factory units and the Ditró furniture and house element factory also operated as a branch. In addition, there was a foundry in the city, established in 1952, which became an independent plant in 1973, a major player in metal

processing in Romania, in addition to I.U.P.S.,<sup>4</sup> U.F.E.T.,<sup>5</sup> the Gyilkostó Szövetkezet (Szövöde), Lenfonoda, etc. By this time, the manufacturing industry had already defined the city's social image. In Gyergyószentmiklós in the 1980s, more than half (60%) of the urban population were factory workers, compared to a negligible number of people living in agriculture (5%) (Garda 1984: 752–755). The effect of *systematization* can be felt with the growing settlement of the population of the surrounding villages,<sup>6</sup> as a result of which new residential areas were built in the city and those who did not move out of the surrounding villages accounted for a significant proportion of factory workers (Sólyom 2014: 307–309).

The memories of the interviewees are mostly organized around hockey, skiing and basketball, but also football plays an important role in my dissertation, as this sport moved the largest crowd in Gyergyószentmiklós in the 1970s and 1980s. The empirical part of the research consists of semi-structured in-depth interviews (13 interviews in total), narrative stories of individuals who were part of the local sporting life during that period. More specifically, active players, instructors, coaches, track maintainers, amateur athletes and those who contribute resources to the operation of various sports, the local elite, who were able to help the smooth operation of sports in their position of power and network of contacts.

My questions were about how sports institutions operated in the economic crisis in the 1970s and 1980s? Who were the ones who operated it and what kind of relationship system they used for it? What other community and symbolic role did each sport play?

The questions sought to explore the procurement techniques and the relationship systems based on them, the power relations and the different passage techniques (Bodó 2004: 85). The research was conducted in February – September 2019, January – July 2020. In addition to the interview method, I used additional empirical data: newspaper articles, memoirs, personal documents and my field diary notes.

### **2.1.3. Bantering (joking relationships)<sup>7</sup>**

My goal was a structural and functional analysis of the political jokes collected locally. After organizing the collected jokes into typologies, it became apparent that not all examples were identical to the type of political joke. My attention turned more and more to these, because I

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<sup>4</sup>MechanicalEngineeringCompany.

<sup>5</sup>Primary Wood Processing and transport Unit.

<sup>6</sup>This is well indicated by the statistics: in 1966 the population of Gheorgheni was 13,204 people, while by 1977 it had increased to 17,428 people (Varga E.1998: 6).

<sup>7</sup> The antropologichal literature mostly name it joking relationships.

discovered a phenomenon that had not been highlighted so far in bantering in response to the contradictions of the dictatorship. Situations created by language and communications in which unspeakable things were wrapped in humor in a utopian discourse for the period in which bantering took place. In the jokes I analyzed the power vs. group of powerless people in which it was possible for the weaker to start the joke on the person representing power, that is, to balance and reverse the asymmetrical balance of power. Furthermore, each of the dialogue situations also refers to the phenomena and everyday hidden practices of the era from different areas of life. Short-term but meaningful references make up these banters.

The examined region is Gyergyószentmiklós and the surrounding settlements located in the eastern part of Transylvania, administratively belonging to Harghita County after the 1968 territorial reorganization. The examples come from semi-structured interviews, each of them is structured according to the same guideline and divided into several topics. Thus, the questions focused on the topics of cultural life, leisure activities, entertainment, sports life and everyday speech events (jokes, anecdotes). Selected cases were spontaneously thematized from interviews in which the recaller felt an affinity to tell a joke or retained in his memory some humorous scenes from the era. In addition to the personal interview, the recollections on jokes also provided written joking occasions and humorous situations from the period under study. The stories sent later in a written form after the interview can be attributed to the fact that the joking experiences and memories did not appear in the interview conversations immediately. It took the recaller time to recall them. Those who remembered them sent the story described afterwards. The questions focused on the everyday life of the eighties and seek answers to the following: How did bantering relate to the formal socialist culture? How has the legitimacy of representations of officiality been weakened? How did teasing situations come about and between whom? What were their purpose and what were the consequences for both those involved in teasing and the outsiders?

#### **2.1.5. Church holidays and entertainment based on the consumption of Western media products**

The fourth theme revolves around the phenomenon of church holidays (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Sunday as a holiday), celebrations of the human life (birth, marriage, death), community holidays and watching videos. In the first case study, I tried to reconstruct holidays, traditions and their changes as well as festive practices and church ceremonies despite prohibitions, in regard to state-mandated holidays and leisure time. I wondered how much of

the hegemony of public holidays affected the *our celebrations*?<sup>8</sup>How were the holidays interpreted, to which they were given special significance? What informal solutions were used in the context of bans?

The other case study is built around community movements, in which I discuss the church movement of church choirs and the meetings of contemporaries. I singled out the church choirs because their declared goal was to stay away from the Song of Romania cultural mass event while doing a cultural church activity. The institution operated informally and the choir meetings were organized accordingly without the formality. The meetings of contemporaries were a new community event operating as quasi-fashion in the period under study. The study also examines what informal techniques were used in order to participate. The two case studies consist mainly of recollections, semi-structured in-depth interviews (19 interviews in total). I was looking for individuals who formed both the group of so-called ordinary people, the group of church representatives and the group of those in higher office. Thus the interviewees include: teacher, school principal, priest, cantor, church choir member, factory worker and students. The interviewees come from the settlements of the Gyergyó Basin: Gyergyószentmiklós, Gyergyószárhegy, Gyergyóújfalu, Gyergyóalfalu, Gyergyócsomafalva and Maroshévíz.

The last study concluding the dissertation illustrates the entertainment habits of the region based on Western media products. On the one hand, I reconstruct the everyday life of a disco run in Szárhegy, which was an official institution operated informally. Reconstructing the phenomenon of watching videos is the second part of the case study. In this I analyze the phenomenon from the perspective of the organizers and the participants. I examine how it is connected with the officiality and how things were done in order to organize video nights. I also reconstruct the operation of an exclusive group of video watchers where the film screenings were organized in the framework of the religious lesson of the parish of Szárhegy. In the same way, I examine media content, procurement techniques and the functions of the event here as well. The topic of watching videos was put in the national context by similar studies about the topic but the local context is largely made up of semi-structured in-depth interviews (12 interviews in total). I tried to involve all the settlements of the Gyergyó Basin in the selection of the interviewees, however, due to the larger local affiliation, the majority of the interviewees come from Szárhegy and a smaller proportion from Csomafalva, Alfalu and Újfalu. I

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<sup>8</sup>By *our celebration* I mean a celebration practice based on the religious traditions of the majority Catholic population of the Gheorgheni Basin, which was considered to be an officially non-existent holiday in the period under study.

purposefully searched for interviewees who were also the operators or participants in video evenings. So the scope of the work was not the main criterion highlighted, but the participation and the operation.

## **2.2. Methodology frameworks for informality and quasi-publicity**

### **2.2.1. Informality**

The analysis is based on the informal dimensions created by Alena Ledeneva and her co-authors in accordance with the global analysis of informality phenomena. Central to this work are the reciprocal actions of the local cultures and community life of the five continents. This work does not restrict the examination areas of the informal practices. So socialism, post-socialism, urban studies, resistance areas are all affected. In the volume, four informal dimensions and their ambivalences are illustrated by case studies – according to which I also analyze the cases in the dissertation. I chose the dimensions of Ledeneva informality for the analysis of the case studies because in the course of the research it became clear that informal practices had other intentions in addition to or in the absence of the operation of the second economy and resistance to the existing system. The cases show that informal strategies were used to express multiple identities: public exercise of group identities based on minority ethnicity, local small community, religious and mutual sporting and artistic aesthetic preferences. On the other hand, for the adaptation of Western European and American modernization patterns. These are the following informal dimensions:

Informal social relations are at the forefront of substantive ambivalence. It is characterized by the sociality of human relationships, social closeness and the instrumental nature of relationships, i.e., the difference between the interest-based use of relationships and the ambivalence of their intertwining. For participants, the sociality of relationships (friends, relatives) is more prominent, while outsiders or observers say that it is about interest-based connections. In separating ambivalence, which presents the greatest difficulty, the frequency of the given situation and the micro-description of its context can provide an explanation (Ledeneva 2018a: 9–13). The ambivalence of exchanges in reciprocal relationships is also perceptible, due to their form of “neither payment nor gift”. The cases and their context may explain whether the given mutual assistance was for friendly, gift-giving or instrumental, interest-based attention (Makovicky – Henig 2018: 125–127).

Normative ambivalence points to the open secrets of identities. They lie in the representations of identity-based belonging and in the manifestation of related consumption

habits, patterns of behavior, ritual practices (religious, music, arts, etc.). Normative ambivalence places participants in the dichotomy of ‘we’ and ‘they’, signifying both acceptance and exclusion. This duality helps to see the complexity of identities by pointing to the operation of multiple identity constructs present at the same time. (Ledeneva 2018a: 10, 213–217). Mutual recognition, solidarity, and the expression of a common identity can also mean resistance, especially symbolic resistance, when authoritarian regimes are hostile to ethnic and religious communities. Solidarity can also engage communities in informal, illegal activities, represented by joint silence, their coded gestures and tacit consents (Ledeneva 2018a: 213; Gordy 2018: 218–219).

Functional ambivalence is associated by the authors with the informal economy and its simultaneous supportive and destructive effects. They argue that survival strategies (in the form of the second economy) often compensated for state regulations, while by circumventing the system they depended on it. They emphasize that in order to understand the ambivalence of the informal economy, it is worth observing how participants think about their actions interpreting them as a reaction forced by the system or as a circumvention of the system. The gray zone between the formal and informal spheres shows the duality of practices brought to life by needs and the series of irregular actions resulting from mere passion, the satisfaction of needs and the ambivalence of greed (need and greed) (Ledeneva 2018b: 3). In some cases, combinations of ingenuity, cooperation and tolerance from the official can forge survival into a thriving business (Radnitz 2018b: 151–153).

Motivational ambivalence refers to the characteristics of the informal exercise of power between the public and private spheres. According to the authors, informal power is parallel to formal power and its means, but it does not always have an informal influence on individual events and is not necessarily related to, but does not preclude them, the formal social positions held by that person. It is also located in the so-called gray zone between the public and the private. The motivations of informal power struggle for material and often exclusively symbolic goods (Ledeneva 2018b: 343–344). One of the central themes of motivational ambivalence is the case-specific features of the asymmetric, vertical relationship system of a patron and a client. Each of the definitions highlights the continuous, long-term and short-term exchange of resources, material goods and services between the patron and the client. These relationships are vertical, where the patron has greater power, recognition and resources. The patron-client relationship refers to systems of mutual trust and involves two types of obligations. On the one hand, it refers to kinship, religious, ethnic value-based obligations – or all of them – and on the



other hand, to formal obligations that hold the client dependent on the patron (Semeneva 2018: 403–408).

### **2.2.2. Quasi-Publicity**

Julianna Bodó in her research describing the socialist society of Szeklerland in the eighties, discusses the mechanism of the room for maneuver of power and individuals along different social publicities. It examines everyday events from the perspective of individuals, the “world below”. She found that in the 1980s, events in Szeklerland became ceremonial that would have been simple everyday situations in a non-dictatorial society (Bodó 2004: 16, 23–27, 109). In the wake of Marc Garcelon, instead of a public-private sphere distinction, Western social theory – a formal, social and private sphere – proposes a threefold division to describe the publicity of Szeklerland’s socialist society; names the dimensions of the formal, quasi-public sphere and the publicity of everyday life. According to this, the official publicity was a space of self-representation of power, fully filled with it, sometimes of monumental proportions, but in the eighties this space had a strictly narrow vocabulary, limited space and duration, the people appeared only as a setting in this publicity. Powerful ceremonialism characterized all manifestations of power. The quasi-public space sought to highlight the values saved for the protection of privacy and to integrate them in the formal sphere. This space was physically more formal, but they provided space for informal events. In this case, the event was constructed from the elements of both spheres for the sake of unmarking, according to possibilities and constraints. Since at that time the official publicity functioned only as a representative publicity, the values to be smuggled into the public sphere were fulfilled in a festive context, mostly in the context of festive events. At such times, an attempt was made to exploit the repertoire of symbols of representative publicity in order to form a discourse well distinguished from its power. In addition, the symbolic elements of power representation also served as a defensive tool, serving as a kind of explanatory opportunity. It was the only public sphere in the era for the public operation of identity. The publicity of everyday life, the private sphere, has also taken significant steps in order to appear in a different field of publicity than usual, to enter the sphere of visibility. There were attempts similar to those of the quasi-public, with the difference that the private sphere did not seek to use elements of the public sphere. The transfer of one's own elements to a foreign space was carried out only during the festive occasions (for example, the celebrations of the fate of human life), but they certainly seized the opportunity to represent the world hidden in everyday life (Bodó 2004: 56–63).

### 3. Results of the dissertation

In the dissertation, I explored the question of how people reacted to control over everyday needs in the second phase of the Ceaușescu era, the so-called “dark years” of the dictatorship, in the Gyergyó Basin. I took an anthropologically oriented approach to historical science, I examined the experience which was seen in the paradigm of everyday history. In addition, I looked at the subject of the study from the perspective of the cultural theory of societal communication, in which I interpreted people’s actions as cultural actions. Mostly, the satisfaction of everyday needs due to the deficit economy, procurement, the operation of the second economy and everyday resistance are at the forefront of the study of the state socialist systems in relation to informality. I considered this important because, although the case studies show analyses of the operation of the second economy in some places, they do not bring new results compared to the existing economic sociological and economic anthropological research.

For example, in the case of the Art Camp and watching videos – and with it I support Gregory Grossman's assertion – it is clear that informal economic activities are not explicitly out of intention to survive, but out of state regulations, restrictions or in many cases out of the lack of consumer goods. On the other hand, it is really not possible to separate informal economic activity from the formal system of economic institutions, as there was a symbiotic relationship between the two spheres, both of which needed the other and thus matching with Manuel Castells – Alejandro Portes and Szabó Á Töhötöm’s results. However, it was seen in the past, for example, in the case of cultural life, sports life and church holidays, that there were other informal practices that go beyond the operation of the informal economy. These actions are often interpreted in literature as a phenomenon of everyday resistance. However, from a thirty-year perspective, based on the chosen methodology and the lack of knowledge of the incomplete archival and state security documents in each case, it is difficult to state that the activities of everyday life were aimed solely at resistance. The case studies show that informality played a central role in most areas of everyday life. I tried to name them. Thus, the dissertation examined cases along two key concepts: informality and quasi-publicity. Ledeneva repeatedly mentions as gray zones the surfaces, spaces, situations where the micro-practices of informality can take place. The examined cases prove that quasi-publicity can be corresponded to the gray zones of informal practices and informality also plays a role in the creation of quasi-publicity that is why I decided to examine the fulfilled relationship of the two concepts in everyday life. Furthermore,

I argue that informality can be seen not only as an underground activity, but as actions and forms of communication that take place in public space but are left out of official discourse.

For this reason, I used the names of the informality dimension (substantive, normative, functional, motivational) created by Alena Ledeneva in the analyses.

I separated four topics in the dissertation, according to which cultural life (the activities of the amateur formations of the Song of Romania festival; the everyday operation of the Gyergyószárhegy Friendship Art Camp), sports life (hockey and football, basketball and ski activities in Gyergyószentmiklós), everyday discourses (bantering containing systemic criticism); and the reconstruction of church holidays and alternative entertainment options (church celebration and individual life celebration, meetings of contemporaries and church choirs and illegal recreation based on the consumption of Western media products). The first case study analyzes the quasi-publicity of mass cultural events. I examined whether there was an opportunity to express the Hungarian national identity at the Song of Romania festival or in preparation for the festival. If so, what techniques were used to do this. I can conclude that there was an opportunity to represent cultural identity in both national, county, and local rounds. This, in turn, required folk song groups, folk dance groups, theater groups, and so on between the leaders and the representatives of the county cultural committee and the visionaries - the world “above” and “below”. This agreement was reached in the establishment of friendly or close relations between the two spheres, in informal conversations and a more humane approach or in the application of little attentions. All this is denoted by expressions used by narrators such as treating people like royalty, a glass of schnapps, a conversation over coffee, an offer. These situations, which took place in quasi-publicity, are strongly focused on informality and on the other hand prove that it was necessary to “getting things done” in cultural life as well.

The peculiarity of the case study on the Art Camp is that it presents an informally operating institution of public interest, which was an independent institution, but was a non-existent unit, functioning only as an annual event of the Culture Committee. Nevertheless, monumental buildings were renovated and restored and the camp hosted a number of other cultural events. Lajos Zöld’s personality is unavoidable in the reconstruction of the everyday life of the Camp. On the one hand, because he ran a well-functioning second economy, not only for survival needs, but for a wider source of income. On the other hand, Zöld and the social environment around him represent a peculiar patron-client relationship in which Zöld’s informal methods of exercising power emerge. He was able to enforce his will by putting the right pressure on different individuals or communities. He was always able to serve the Young Friends of the Camp by expanding the limited entertainment provided by the acquired goods (for example,

hard-to-obtain consumer goods) or the limited dining facilities of the time (he made available the monastery dining room, the castle Knight's Hall) and the Art Camp due to its growing prestige, it also endowed this young company with an exclusive group identity that stood out from the rest of the village. He was able to convince factory managers, collective farm leaders and cultural committee leaders, especially in cases that proved difficult, by referring people to the county party committee or asking them to put pressure on those local leaders.

In terms of leisure use, cultural life was strongly top-down and politicized. Amateur formations had to work compulsorily, as they filled the programs of Song of Romania with content. Recollectors perceived ideological limitations, however, there were two types of efforts on the part of the participants. On the one hand, the leaders of the formations tried to highlight the local ethnic values in the public and on the other hand, the participants experienced the rehearsals and participation in the festival as an opportunity for relaxation, togetherness and community experience. The same can be said about the Art Camp, where spending free time had a completely different interpretation from the point of view of different groups. The artists viewed the camp as an island where they could create, have fun, and exchange ideas without ideological constraints. The Cultural Committee and other county leaders also provided a self-forgetful recreational space and an opportunity to avoid publicity and an alternative leisure opportunity for the Young Friends of the Camp, despite the fact that they helped Zöld.

In the chapter presenting sports life, I focused on socialist professionalism and self-organizing informal sports institutions as well as on the conditions for the establishment of various sports facilities (ice rinks, ski lifts, etc.). In the initial phase of the research, I wanted to reconstruct the experiences of the Daciada national mass sports event established in 1977. However, the recollectors repeatedly refused to attend this event. Instead, they remembered locally run mass sports events (hockey and football games), the Előre Cup (junior hockey cup), factory-organized mini-soccer tournaments, small-field basketball tournaments or afternoon workouts (such as the Old Boys basketball team). Although these were also mostly top-down, state-regulated events, the participants' 'world view' took place in a different dimension, in the interpretation of local and small communities, in a so-called parallel world. The case study on the Art Camp and sports have two things in common. One is the quasi-public around the person of István Török and Lajos Zöld. Both individuals are considered to be links who were located in the center of the locality and had a network of contacts extending to Bucharest. They were not the pinnacle of the power elite, but the bureaucratic apparatus that was closely associated with the highest strata of the power elite. The recollections of both of them were associated with almost the same adjectives as those with good sentiment, Hungarian sentiment, despite the

fact that they officially represented power-ideological visions. Recallers justified this by putting the interests of the community first. However, they were also characterized by a kind of careerism, which Verdery calls the phenomenon of competition between bureaucrats. The goal was to “gather” as many resources as possible and occupy areas of trust as close as possible to the summit of the power elite (Verdery 1994: 55) so that he could turn them to the benefit of his own community. Personal influence, efficient allocation of resources, reciprocal relationships characterized their activities, which moved their reputation in a positive direction, associated with a kind of prestige value that was recognized locally (Verdery 1994: 54). This prestige value could also be used among the locals to carry out more and more affairs. Their activities influenced both cultural policy (Kiss 2012: 187) and sports life in opposite directions. The other common feature in the life of sports and the Art Camp is the creation of objects and the institution of collaborative work and community work in it. Thus, the restoration of the Franciscan monastery in Szárhegy and the Lázár Castle or the realization of the project of the Gyergyószentmiklós ice rink are also included. All this at a time when ideological rigor is getting stronger, the consequences of the economic crisis are becoming more and more unbearable in everyday life. Community work is not the product of the period under study, much earlier (1948),<sup>9</sup> with the development of state socialism, the use of so-called patriotic work in larger investments (construction of canals, water networks, buildings, roads) became common practice. Community work meant top-down, compulsory, out-of-hours work ordered in the public interest, in which students, collective farm workers and employees of other institutions were required to participate. In this way, it provided public institutions with free human labor, to which a strong ideological message was associated, such as the promotion of the cause of the party and the homeland.

The institution of community work also operated in the examined region, but its “customers” (István Török, Lajos Zöld, factory directors) ordered the given work not in the spirit of the party and the country, but in the interest of the local public profit, developments and catching up. In their reading, the positive quality of community work becomes emphasized, the cooperation, the will to do. On the other hand, recallers note in several cases that not everyone was able to internalize even local public interest work, but still they had to take part. Thus, the institution of community work is a nationally ordered, ideologically charged activity that was appropriately expropriated by local leaders. In the recollections, the line between the collaborative work and the community work is blurred in several places in connection with the

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<sup>9</sup>The 35th anniversary of the institution of public works is commemorated in the August 19, 1983 issue of *Előre*.

investment in public buildings. Despite the social changes that took place in state socialism (urbanization, commuting from village to city, etc.), the institution of collaborative work, which is typical of the region dating back centuries, did not become extinct. Recourse to mutual assistance schemes continued to be beneficial, not only for private work but also for investments in the public interest. The collaborative work was created when a small group close to the customer joined (for example to scythe for Lajos Zöld, pick potatoes, clean the castle buildings or build ski lifts). In general, group members knew each other well and volunteered to help. On the other hand, in the course of community work, a larger crowd of people worked at the same time, outside working hours or during working hours, it was not a voluntary assistance but a compulsory job opportunity, which was not well-received by everyone. In the memories, the blurring of the line between the two forms of work can be caused by the fact that most of the time people were offered food and drink not only after the collaborative work occasions, but also at the end of community work.

In the chapter examining ordinary discourses, I analyzed dialogue events that provide responses to the contradictions and difficulties of everyday life and the absurdity of the existing system. Quasi-publicity can also be observed in the discourse of everyday life and symbolic resistance becomes clear in this chapter. The analyzed banterers all reconstruct situations that confront official discourse so that unspeakable things can be uttered for a short time, instinctively taking advantage of one of the most basic nature of jokes, that participants are tacitly aware of the possibility of insult. Bantering achieved a similar result as political jokes, as they still live in memory today. My goal in analyzing banterers was to show other alternatives to political jokes to the symbolic resistance in ordinary discourses and to the knowledge that characterized informality.

The fourth theme was built around, on the one hand, celebrations of ecclesiastical and individual turns of fate as well as movements that did not exist officially (church choir meetings) and community celebrations that became more fashionable with major representations in the era called meetings of contemporaries. On the other hand, recreational opportunities based on the consumption of Western media products constituted the concluding unit of analysis. In connection with the holidays, I examined the prohibitions and how, in spite of these, and what informal means were used to be part of the ceremonies and with it of the community life. Two conclusions can be drawn from the case studies: 1. the results partly contradict the statements made by Vilmos Keszeg, Ferenc Pozsony and Julianna Bodó about the holiday in the period under study. So about the fact that the meeting of church holidays was pushed back between the walls of the private sphere and the church.

Factory “celebrations” are also part of the recollections of Christmas and Easter. Despite the fact that the state made the holidays of the Christian churches non-existent, it did bring them to the attention of the public, because in factories and schools, the working communities symbolically created the atmosphere of *our celebration*, albeit for a short time, and with it they also moved the official ideology in the opposite direction. 2. in addition, the reinterpretation of the relationship with traditions and religion can be seen in connection with the holidays to which Zoltán A. Biró also drew the attention. So that the significance of the holidays was present not only in their symbols and meaning, but in the communal coexistences, at the celebration, or to use the words of the locals: *at the bash*. This created the illusion that people were free to control their free time. It can also be stated that although locally (as well as nationally) the church retained its community organizing and retaining power, nevertheless a certain degree of secularization is already visible. This is reflected in the emphasis on holiday interpretations, so in the party and entertainment mentioned above. On the other hand, not only the faithful but also the representatives of the church point out, in connection with watching films, that they were able to organize larger masses into a community mostly, because there was an even greater demand for watching movies than practicing religion. The secularization that began in the era was the result of both the slow infiltration of Western modernization patterns and top-down and limited leisure opportunities and prohibitions, while the church remained a strong social organizing institution. The dimensions of Ledeneva informality and their ambivalences are present in each case study, but I did not aim to force each dimension in all cases. I looked at what the most characteristic of the situations was and how it could be articulated. Normative ambivalence is markedly evident in the Song of Romania competitions in the public identity exercise of the formations. Here, “we” and “they” are also the fault lines between the powerless and those with power and in some places between the Romanian and Hungarian nationalities. The normative ambivalence of informality can be seen just as sharply in the case studies discussing the holidays, here only the division and connection of power and the world without power can be seen. In this chapter, the key expressions of informality are: *in the dark, in silence, tacitly, in the evening*.

Motivational ambivalence is most visible in the patron-client relationships of Lajos Zöld and István Török, in situations where matters were handled (entertainments, gatherings, wine drinkings, dinners, etc.) by means of informal power exercise. Substantive ambivalence is seen in the unique, case-specific nature of relationships. Here, in most cases, humane proximity is emphasized by the recollectors, but the relations of interest are also well defined, nevertheless it is difficult to separate the operation of the relations of interest and friendships, the chosen

methodology barely if ever enables it. Functional ambivalence becomes visible in the operation of the second economies (Art Camp) or in the lives of informally run sports institutions, in the way in which formal institutions are exploited to the public interest as far as possible. A further aim of my dissertation was to present the interactions between individuals and power and the transitions between the two spheres through the characteristics of the seventies and eighties. I can conclude that, just like in the case of the informal economy, all areas of the formal and informal sphere – should it be cultural life or sport life – not inseparable factors, but we can talk about close connections and interactions, where the bureaucrats of the given area played key roles. However, it can also be taken from the cases that the actions were mostly not created for the purpose of resistance, but to satisfy the current needs, to fill the gaps that deviated from the operation according to the logic of power. On the one hand, they moved the given political system in the opposite direction and on the other hand, it strengthened its functioning.

Summarizing the results of the dissertation, I think that the dissertation answered the questions raised in the theoretical introduction in detail. It highlighted the topic of informality in a new research framework that brought to the surface the informal practices of a national minority in Romania related to ethnic, religious identity through the example of the Gyergyó Basin. I argue that the dissertation has new results and insights into the findings of the existing work on the countries with a state socialist social order and their informal practices. Thus, in addition to operating the second economy and attitudes toward the existing system of power, informal practices reflect additional intentions: minority, ethnic and religious identity, to operate the small communities' mutual sports and artistic aesthetic preferences in the quasi-publicity and to adapt Western and American modernization patterns (by consumption of consumer goods and media products).



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## 5. Annexes

Code	Type of the interview	Gender	Location	Workplace	Date of Birth
R1	personal	male	Gyergyóremete	Healthcare	1934
R2	personal	male	Gyergyószentmiklós	Skilled Worker, Cultural life	1947
R3	personal	male	Gyergyóalfalu	Cultural Life	1954
R4	personal	male	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker	1965
R5	personal	female	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker	1970
R6	personal	female	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker, Student	1969
R7	personal	male	Gyergyócsomafalva	Skilled Worker, Cultural Life	1944
R8	personal	male	Gyergyószárhegy	Church	1957
R9	personal	female	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker, Student	1968
R10	personal	female	Gyergyószentmiklós	Cultural Life, Administration	1939
R11	personal	male	Gyergyócsomafalva	Education	1941
R12	personal	female	Gyergyószárhegy	Education	1950
R13	personal	male	Gyergyócsomafalva	Education	1941
R14	personal	male	Csíkszereda	Cultural Leader	1946
R15	personal	male	Csíkszereda	Sport	1954
R16	personal	male	Gyergyószentmiklós	Cultural Leader	1946
R17	personal	female	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker	1943
R18	personal	male	Gyergyószentmiklós	Education, Administration	1943
R19	personal	male	Borszék	Forestry	1960
R20	personal	male	Borszék	Education	1948
R21	personal	female	Gyergyóremete	Worker	1931
R22	personal	female	Gyergyószárhegy	Healthcare	1968
R23	personal	male	Csíkszereda	Cultural Leader	1936

R24	personal	female	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker	1963
R25	personal	male	Gyergyóújfalu	Skilled Worker	1942
R24	personal	male	Gyergyóújfalu	Skilled Worker	1942
R25	personal	male	Gyergyóalfalu	Worker, Cultural Life	1958
R26	personal	male	Gyergyóalfalu	Cultural life, Worker	1958
R27	personal	female	Gyergyószárhegy	Education	1936
R28	personal	female	Gyergyóújfalu	Education	1952
R29	personal	male	Csíkszereda	Administration	1942
R30	personal	male	Gyergyóújfalu	Education	1944
R31	personal	female	Gyergyóalfalu	Education	1961
R32	personal	male	Gyergyószentmiklós	Sport	1968
R33	personal	female	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker	1968
R34	personal	male	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker	1961
R35	personal	male	Gyergyószárhegy	Church	1961
R36	personal	male	Gyergyóújfalu	Sport	1950
R37	personal	male	Gyergyószentmiklós	Administration	1949
R38	personal	male	Gyergyóalfalu	Church	1953
R39	personal	male	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker, Church	1936
R40	personal	male	Borszék	Technical Intellectuals	1955
R41	personal	male	Gyergyóújfalu	Administration	1942
R42	personal	female	Borszék	Education	1959
R43	personal	male	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker	1965
R44	personal	male	Gyergyóremete	Administration, Cultural Life	1943
R45	personal	female	Gyergyóalfalu	Education	1959
R46	personal	male	Gyergyószentmiklós	Sport	1943
R47	personal	male	Csíkszereda	Cultural Life	1940

R48	personal	male	Gyergyószentmiklós	Cultural Life, Administration	1950
R49	personal	male	Gyergyóújfalu	Education	1949
R50	personal	male	Maroshévíz	Church	1954
R51	personal	male	Gyergyóújfalu	Church	1950
R52	personal	male	Gyergyóújfalu	Administration	1939
R53	personal	male	Gyergyószentmiklós	Cultural Leader	1947
R54	personal	male	Gyergyóditró	Cultural Leader	1939
R55	personal	female	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker	1943
R56	personal	male	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker, Student	1968
R57	personal	female	Gyergyószárhegy	Skilled Worker, Student	1972
R58	personal	male	Gyergyócsomafalva	Cultural Leader	1944
R59	personal	male	Gyergyószentmiklós	Sport, Skilled Worker	1944
R60	personal	male	Gyergyóújfalu	Education	1949
R61	personal	male	Gyergyószentmiklós	Sport, Technical Intellectual	1945
R62	personal	male	Csíkszereda	Administration	1945
R63	personal	male	Gyergyószentmiklós	Sport, Education	
R64	personal	female	Gyergyószentmiklós	Education, Cultural Leader	1953
R65	personal	male	Gyergyóalfalu	Skilled Worker	1940

## 6. The author's publications on the topic

Kovács Eszter (2019): Ugratásokba sűrített hétköznapiak: Elbeszéléstörténetek a Gyergyói-medencéből (1980-as évek). *Múltunk*, 64. évfolyam 4. szám, pp. 1–22.

Kovács Eszter (2020): Nyilvánosság a diktatúrában. Elbeszéléstörténetek a Gyergyói-medence kulturális életéről. *Jel – Kép*, 2. – különszám. pp. 91 – 105.